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## Viewing cable 06BEIRUT955, MGLE01: NON-HIZBALLAH SHIA PERSPECTIVE ON

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06BEIRUT955</a>	<a href="#">2006-03-27 07:09</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Beirut</a>

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SUBJECT: MGLE01: NON-HIZBALLAH SHIA PERSPECTIVE ON

## NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

### SUMMARY

1. (C) Shia MP Ali Bazzi and MP Ali Osseiran view the on-going national dialogue as an important development whose long-term impact considerably outweighs any immediate results. These independent Shia politicians believe that, although several formerly sensitive issues had already entered public discourse (Hizballah's arms, Lahoud's legitimacy, Palestinian militias), the dialogue was the first time these issues were being discussed by the principal protagonists face-to-face. Bazzi, however, believes that regional involvement, specifically intermediation efforts by Saudi Arabia, will be necessary to resolve the thorniest issues, because they all involve the Syrian regime. Shia MP Ali Osseiran, on the other hand, insists that US/Syrian and US/Iranian relations are the real key to progress in Lebanon. Osseiran contends that Damascus and Tehran still call the shots for Hizballah and, with international pressure increasing on Iran, is certain that Tehran will prevent Nasrallah from moving too far -- especially with regard to Hizballah's arms. Concerning the Palestinian militias located in Lebanon, Osseiran believes they are a spent force, remarking "certainly Nasrallah would prefer to keep them as a buffer against disarmament pressure, but few in the Shia community care for them, and Shia leaders have decided to let the government disarm them." End summary.

2. (SBU) MP Ali Bazzi, an Amal ally of Nabih Berri who holds a US passport and represents a constituency in Bint Jubayl (a few miles north of the Blue Line), met with poloff on March 22 at his office in parliament. MP Ali Osseiran, who comes from a long line of political leaders -- his father was Speaker of Parliament in the 1950s -- and represents the south Lebanon district of Zahrani, met with poloff the following day in south Beirut. Both legislators are regarded as honest, dedicated public servants. They share the characteristic of blunt conversation and neither believes Hizballah should be the only representative of the country's Shia community.

### ABOVE EXPECTATIONS

3. (C) MP Bazzi expressed modest surprise that the national dialogue's headstrong participants have been able to maintain relative comity during nearly three weeks of meetings. When he first learned of Berri's plan for the conference, he did not give it much chance of success and felt that Jumblatt and Aoun in particular would use the forum to grandstand. He now believes that despite the attendees apparent inability to resolve two core issues -- Lahoud's presidency and Hizballah's arms -- the fact that they have placed these issues on the table is significant and will set the stage for further discussion and resolution in the next few months, particularly regarding the presidency.

4. (C) The chain-smoking delegate from Bint Jubayl acknowledged that the presidency issue had become more difficult in the past few days. Whereas in the initial sessions, Hassan Nasrallah had indicated that a list of several presidential candidates would be acceptable -- as long as the candidates' intended policies regarding the "resistance" were presented up front -- now the Hizballah leader was insisting that only one candidate could be proposed by the Maronite community. This change of position resulted from a realization that the country's electoral system basically allows Hizballah/Amal an effective vet for only one round of parliamentary voting to select a president.

5. (C) Bazzi felt that Nasrallah was seriously calculating the costs of staying with Lahoud -- who he remarked that even in the Shia community was becoming something of a laugh line. But being a cunning politician, Bazzi believed Nasrallah was

patiently waiting for the best deal to switch his support.

¶6. (C) With regard to how much the national dialogue would actually accomplish, Bazzi said the answer depended on Saudi Arabia's influence with the Asad regime, because nearly all the issues under consideration had a Syrian component. Although he was not aware of specific plans, he suspected that next week's Arab Summit in Khartoum would be the scene of concerted arm twisting for Syria to make concessions on diplomatic relations, demarcation of borders, and the Lahoud presidency.

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#### ALI OSSEIRAN TAKES A BROADER VIEW

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¶7. (C) MP Osseiran, who last year was considered a leading candidate for Speaker before Nabih Berri seized the prize, predicted that Hizballah would faithfully obey its Iranian sponsors and jealously protect its arms for as long as possible. In his opinion, Nasrallah had skillfully eliminated all opposition in the Shia community and had made Hizballah an important regional asset for the ambitious Iranian regime. Osseiran strongly believed it was wishful thinking on the part of Hariri, Aoun and others that they could somehow moderate Hizballah and negotiate a near-term disarmament.

¶8. (C) The veteran member of parliament said, like it or not, US relations with Syria and, more importantly Iran, were the key to resolving Lebanon's difficulties. Osseiran said his evaluation envisions continued hostile relations between the US and the two regional powers over the difficult issues of Iraq and nuclear weapons, and as long as that conflict persists, Syria and Iran will keep as many proxies as possible in the region, specifically in Iraq, Lebanon, and the West Bank/Gaza. He suggested that perhaps a deal could be made that would finish off the decaying Lahoud presidency, but the primary objectives of the international community as expressed in UNSCR 1559 were most likely not achievable in the current political environment. Additionally, Osseiran was not optimistic regarding the establishment of normal diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon and plainly expected the Syrian regime to delay, obfuscate, and deny responsibility.

#### PALESTINIAN ARMS

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¶9. (C) Other than the status of Lahoud, the only other issue which was possible to resolve at this time was the disarmament of the Palestinian militias located outside the twelve established refugee camps and "better control" of the militias inside the camps. Osseiran remarked that the Palestinian leadership in Lebanon was inept and had squandered considerable goodwill. This mismanagement, along with residual Lebanese resentment over Palestinian actions during the long civil war, had put the community in a vulnerable political situation. He commented on the relative ease with which the national dialogue members reached consensus on disarming/controlling the Palestinian militias, and said the door to this action had actually been opened by Abu Mazen several months ago when he stated that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were "guests" and had responsibilities as such.

¶10. (C) Even with this success, however, the veteran politician expressed his regret that further progress on other issues, such as bilateral relations and offering the Shia community political alternatives, appeared unlikely for the foreseeable future.

FELTMAN